

Workshop: Vocabulary - Acquisition and Practical Strategies

I. Quick Write:

What is a quick write? It is a pre-writing or brainstorming technique to get students thinking about a topic. Instruct students to write continuously for 3–5 mins. (depending on proficiency level) – students' pen/pencil should not be lifted from the paper! Note that quick writes should never be corrected or graded for grammar or mechanical errors. The quick write should be followed by a sharing session.

Your quick write prompt is:

What kinds of vocabulary do your students need? What kinds of problems do your students have with learning vocabulary? What techniques do you use to teach vocabulary?

II. What do we know about vocabulary acquisition?

- ❑ Students typically rate it as the most important component of learning English and also where they have the biggest gaps.
- ❑ Vocabulary teaching tends to be neglected or taught in ineffective ways (e.g., decontextualized lists).
- ❑ Where possible, teach vocabulary thematically. Students recall words better that have some connection to a theme or topic.
- ❑ Vocabulary learning makes a variety of demands on learners: Cultural, specialized. Generational, etc.
- ❑ Research has shown that students need **7-9** exposures of a new word in order to master it and convert it to active use.
- ❑ Help students distinguish between conversational English vocabulary and academic English vocabulary.
- ❑ 82% of the words on Academic Word List are of Latin or Greek origin. So – it makes sense to have students practice word parts – prefixes, stems, and suffixes) (Coxhead, 2000).

□ Michael Lewis in his book *The Lexical Approach* (2002, Heinle & Heinle) suggests the following principles:

1. The grammar/vocabulary dichotomy is invalid. He says that “Language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar.”
2. A central element of language teaching is raising students’ awareness of, and developing their ability to “chunk” language successfully. Collocation is a useful organizing principle for teaching vocabulary.

III. What are effective ways to teach vocabulary?

1. Vocabulary instruction must be systematic and multi-faceted. It should be “strategy-oriented” rather than “word” oriented.
2. Students must be taught strategies for learning vocabulary on their own: flash cards, word wheels, word walls, vocabulary notebooks/journals, etc.
3. Students need to find their own preferred learning style: visual, aural, kinesthetic, and what activities help them – self-testing, matching, drawing, acting (e.g., Charades), etc.
4. Students need to learn how to guess the meaning of vocabulary from context. Teachers shouldn’t just tell students to do this. It’s too difficult! They must be taught a variety of strategies.
5. Vary your instructional strategies and make vocabulary learning fun through crossword puzzles and graphic organizers. See these web sites: www.varietygames.com/CW - Instant Online Crossword Puzzle Maker; <http://coldfusion.mead.k12.wa.us/ls/subject2.cfm?callvar=dbblmap>
Students can also “play” with analogies. Analogies help students to see connections between words (synonyms, antonyms, examples, part to whole, grammatical structure, cause/effect, sequence, etc.).
6. Play vocabulary games in class. Use board games if possible. Play “round games.” The first person says at least a five-letter word, and the next person must say a word that begins with the last letter of the previous word. For example, “backward” → “demand” → “reply” → “youth” Have students write cards, letters, emails such as a “thank you” note where that uses several synonyms to express what a good time they had – *wonderful, fabulous, terrific, marvelous*, etc.
7. Make use of new technologies such as corpus linguistic studies to determine frequent and essential vocabulary.